


HOW MY FATHER SECURED  
LINCOLN'S AUTOGRAPH

By FRANCIS DURBIN BLAKESLEE

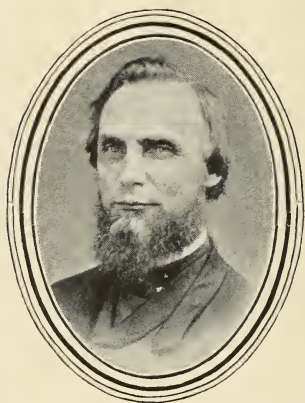




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GEORGE HARMON BLAKESLEE  
1819—1876

# How My Father Secured Lincoln's Autograph

BY

FRANCIS DURBIN BLAKESLEE

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**F**OR A YEAR AND A HALF, including the close of the great Civil War, I was a clerk in the Quartermaster General's Office at Washington, D. C. My father, the Rev. George Harmon Blakeslee, was then pastor of the Court Street Methodist Episcopal Church of Binghamton, New York.

In response to a call of the Christian Commission, my father, along with other pastors in the North, secured a temporary release from pastoral duties and was engaged in special service at the front, ministering to soldiers on the battlefields and in hospitals, and holding religious services among the troops, from October 4 to November 4, 1864.

On his way home from the field, he stopped with me at my lodging-place in Washington. At the breakfast table, the morning of November 2, 1864, he said, (referring to a brother minister who had accompanied him and who was then at another home in the Capital,) "We are going to call upon the President this morning."

When next we met, in the evening, he showed me the autograph of President Lincoln, obtained by him that day.

*For G. H. Blakeslee.*

*A. Lincoln*  
*Nov. 2, 1864*

This was in the memorandum book of the Christian Commission, given to my father as one of the delegates in that service.

A few years ago, in my attic at Binghamton, where I resided from 1908 to 1918, I unexpectedly came across two little plain blank-books, which proved to be the diary of my father during the month that he served the Christian Commission.

I turned with eagerness to the date on which my father visited me, and to my delight found the record of the interview of these two Methodist preachers with Lincoln at the White House, the second of November, 1864:

*At 2 P. M. accompanied by Rev. E. W. Breckinridge, visited the Presidential Mansion. Four young men approached the President who were anxious to get his aid relative to a matter which I did not understand. But Mr. Lincoln, who was seated in his chair, replied to them kindly but firmly, "I can do nothing for you." When they urged that their papers should be read, he replied, "I should not remember if I did. The papers can be put into their proper places and go through their proper channels." A lady next appeared and presented a paper. He took it and read it and replied, "This will not do. I can do nothing for your husband." "Why not?" said the lady. "Because," said Mr. Lincoln, "he is not loyal." "But he intends to be; he wants to take the oath of allegiance." "That is the way with all who get into prison," replied the President. "I can do nothing for you." "But you would," said the lady, "if you knew my circumstances." "No, I would not. I am under no obligation to provide for the wives of disloyal husbands. Hasn't your husband the consumption?" "No," replied the lady. "Well," said the President, "it is the only case. Nearly all have the consumption."*

*Another lady presented her case which was a similar one and met a similar result. Next Rev.*

*E. W. Breckinridge presented himself and handed him his card. "What is your name?" asked Mr. Lincoln. "Breckinridge," replied Brother B. "Rather a suspicious name\*, but I am loyal. I have long desired to see you and take you by the hand. I am glad to see you bearing your labors so well. You have the prayers of the people, and I pray for the speedy and peaceful termination of the war on the principles of your proclamation." Meanwhile I shook the hand of the President and asked him for his autograph. He took the book which I presented and cheerfully gave his name. Brother B. presented his book and received Mr. Lincoln's signature. We then bade him goodbye and took our leave, thankful for the privilege of seeing and shaking hands with the President.*

*As we passed out of the Presidential Mansion we met on the veranda the President's son, some nine years of age. He was handling some boards that lay there for the purpose of building a scaffold. We shook hands with him and Brother B. inquired his name. He replied, "Tom."† We went from there to the Quartermaster General's Office and found Durbin. We repaired to the rooms of the Commission on 10th Street, and spent the evening very pleasantly with a number of the delegates.*

Thus runs the simple narrative of my father's interview with President Lincoln, the Great Heart in the White House; but it clearly reveals that the great man, who has such a reputation for sympathetic tenderness, could be severely just when occasion demanded.

I treasure as prized possessions the leather-bound book which contains the autograph inscription in Lincoln's own hand, and my father's diary relating how he secured this precious memento

that memorable day. These keepsakes bring back to me sacred memories of two of God's noble-men, — my beloved father and the immortal Lincoln.

## NOTES

\*Breckinridge was the name of one of Lincoln's opponents for the Presidency from the South who favored secession.

†Thomas Lincoln, commonly called "Tad," was then eleven years of age instead of nine, as he appeared to be.

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*Francis Durbin Blakelee*





